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ABSTRACT

The status of foreign language instruction in American education is the focus of the introductory remarks in this paper. The role of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; current enrollment trends in language programs; and trends in teaching methods, teacher education, and the job market are briefly examined. A prognosis of concerns of the language teaching profession includes discussion of needs and trends in (1) the declining population, (2) federal aid, (3) new scheduling patterns, (4) budget cuts, (5) the "new student," (6) mini-courses and individualization, (7) articulation, (8) foreign languages and human relations, (9) goals, (10) careers, (11) public relations, and (12) the national scene. (RL)

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WHERE FROM HERE?

The title of this paper demands that we first spend a few minutes establishing where we are in this midwinter 1973. Let's have a quick look.

First of all, we have a national organization dedicated to the entire language teaching profession, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. This organization provides for its members two periodicals, a national meeting, and regional and national conferences on current concerns in the profession. This year, for example, ACTFL sponsored conferences on the "Teaching of Culture," "French Literature of Black Expression," and "Alternatives in Foreign Language Teaching." I mention ACTFL particularly because it is a relatively new organization and because it is devoted to helping all foreign language teachers work together for their common interests. We will discuss ACTFL some more later, but I want to stress that I see ACTFL beginning to do its job of unifying the profession, something we need badly.

Secondly, compared with the situation before 1960 we have a high level of enrollment in the secondary schools. At the same time we are experiencing a scary fall off in secondary enrollments. In colleges, during the 1960's, we saw a steady growth in actual numbers of students, but foreign language enrollment remained a constant percentage of an increasing overall college enrollment. Here, too, we see an alarming enrollment fall off in many but not all institutions of higher learning.

Next, we have a huge foreign language teacher surplus and many new graduates on the way. The vast majority that I interview are infinitely superior to the new graduates we employed ten years ago.

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At the same time, it is astounding to me that foreign language teacher education departments are continuing to graduate many young people who don't have a prayer of getting a teacher position in this murderously competitive job market.

Still another characteristic of the present situation is that departments are generally well supplied with materials and equipment. Programs are audio-lingually oriented and teacher centered, although individualization and mini-courses are being widely tried.

Finally, we have failed to solve many of our long term problems: articulation, huge dropouts, a narrow, literature-oriented curriculum, a reputation for elitism, and an aloofness from the educational mainstream.

Looking ahead, the future looks very dangerous, and we had better face up to the dangers:

The Declining Population First of all, there is a population trough now in the primary grades. This population drop will hit the secondary schools about 1980. For example, we estimate that from our present enrollment of 30,000 secondary school students in Minneapolis we will drop to 20,000. Put another way, we will lose 1/3 of our secondary school students. It will have to be a very dynamically growing community to hold its own against this trend. This cannot bode well for us. The colleges will be affected only a few years later. Yet teacher education programs appear to be increasing production for the declining market of the 1980's.

Federal Aid Secondly, there is the new push from Washington for career education. It appears that large numbers of young people are going to be guided into vocational education in high school and in post high programs. I am not convinced that this new focus is bad, but it has important implications for us in the foreign language field.

New Schedules Thirdly, there is in the high schools a trend away from scheduling patterns which made it easier for students to enroll in several electives. Abuse by some students of independently directed study time has led to the abandoning of so-called flexible schedules. At the same time, quarter and tri-semester courses now moving into the schools present new challenges and competition for students.

Budget Cuts Next, there are sizable budget cuts in the offing. Many of the country's bigger school districts are wallowing in red ink, and suburban districts are now beginning to feel the pinch. Tighter budgets mean larger pupil-teacher ratios, fewer teaching materials and supplies, less equipment, and the cancellation of small classes or the combination with other sections (no matter that the students are at different levels). Tight budgets also mean abolishing leadership positions: released-time or paid department chairmen, and supervisors. Colleges are suffering as well. At the college level not only will

positions be lost, but some foreign language teacher education programs will have to close.

The New Student Still another problem is what some people are calling the new student. William Glasser says that in the past we were goal-oriented. Simply, that people's ambition was to work hard and achieve financial success; at the very least, as much as our parents. In a few cases some of these people made it big: the Mellons, Carnegies, and the Fords. These people then dropped goal orientation for role orientation. They wanted to do something for society rather than just for themselves. Students now, according to Glasser, have never felt want. Coming from affluence, they are not goal-oriented but role-oriented. They want to be involved in decision-making, to be a part of the action. This new student wants to do what he regards as important. Thus, he may react negatively to the teacher who tells him what he is going to learn, how he is going to learn it, and when. The new student is likely also to have difficulty with foreign languages because of their extremely long range goals.

Mini-Courses and Individualization One way to appeal to this new student is to develop alternatives to the present literary emphasis. The so-called mini-courses offer a possibility of providing for individual interests, setting short term goals, and providing a current curriculum. Mini-courses range from those with a literary focus to interdisciplinary offerings appealing to student interests in home economics, art, business, music, and many more. My own state of Minnesota developed early guidelines for courses of this kind. An ongoing survey being conducted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the Far West Regional Laboratory shows that schools over the country have seized on this idea to diversify foreign language offerings. The results of this survey will be published in early summer.

Yet a dilemma is posed for the profession by the education-wide trend toward individualization of instruction. Five years ago, the vast majority of teachers would have indicated preference for teacher centered, audio-lingual methods. Now there is a neo-eclectic movement, a feeling that the teacher will have to adapt his teachniques to the needs of the learner. There is also a feeling that the teacher will have to be himself, not a carbon copy of a hyperthyroid demonstration teacher. The individual is in style for the teacher as well as for the student. (It is interesting to note that individualization continues to proliferate at the same time that schools are phasing out flexible modular schedules specifically designed to encourage individualization.)

Can individual teachers develop the sophisticated learning materials which will keep students interested and successful learners? Will many students feel neglected and become discouraged without constant teacher directed activity?

Articulation Foreign language teachers have as another major concern the apparently poor articulation in foreign language sequences between junior and senior high schools and between high schools and colleges. Some of this articulation difficulty may result from the nature of American schools. In the United States, language sequences may be interrupted by transfers from elementary to middle schools and then to junior high school, senior high school, and college. Each transfer means a change of teacher. It may also include a change of learning materials, a change of teaching method, and a change of classmates.

As a result, the new student from the junior high school often finds the senior high school class difficult and unrewarding. The student who has taken five years of secondary school Spanish may find himself placed in second or third semester college classes. It's an old story, but it continues to frustrate young people who have been led to believe that they are learning the equivalent of advanced placement at the next higher level.

There is no easy solution. Perhaps we need to begin by promising less. In view of the great differences in students, teachers, schools, methods, and materials, each course must have its own integrity. Students may be told that their placement in a school's program is not based on time spent in a previous program but on achievement. They also must be told that differences in courses mean that one may experience some problems in adjusting to a new school's foreign language program.

Foreign Languages and Human Relations Reluctantly, the schools are being forced to accept a major role in defusing interracial-intercultural conflict.

The schools have in the past worked precisely against this objective in many ways, for example, by hiring few, if any, minority teachers. Foreign language department members were often chosen precisely because they in no way reflected the foreign culture in looks, accent, or body language. "This teacher does not fit into this neighborhood" is a direct quote from a high school principal who didn't think his neighborhood could face up to the reality of having a pretty, but obviously Latin American woman teaching in his school.

What are we as foreign language teachers prepared to do about preparing young people to live in a multi-racial, multi-cultural world? I mean teaching cultural understanding, not monuments or dead heroes.

Goals One major question is what we do in the future about justifying language instruction in the school curriculum. Marshall MacLuhan has charged that the schools are like a driver who drives looking in the rear view mirror. MacLuhan and Alvin Toffler, the author of Future Shock, want us to look to the future, non-print media, or to the crisis of accelerating change. Shane, in a recent Phi Delta Kappan article, asked if we were going to concern ourselves with what he called trivial

changes--application of linguistics was one example he used--or whether we were going to face up to the real problems of society: human relations, the environment, equity for all, and internationalism. The question then is, do we need better ways of doing that which we have been doing all along, or are we prepared to play a part in attempting to save society by coming to grips with its problems?

Careers Every now and then an enterprising foreign language teacher or professor checks on ads in the New York Times and demonstrates the large number and variety of occupations in which foreign language knowledge is required or desirable. Last summer a couple of our teachers surveyed Twin City industry and found a substantial number of companies that were using or seeking foreign language speakers in positions ranging from clerical to middle management. A most interesting discovery of our teachers was that one multi-national company headquartered in St. Paul sponsored a club with seven hundred employee members who meet for language lessons and practice, and who travel together all over the world.

In the United States, schools and colleges have largely left this avocational-vocational language learning to commercial educational institutions. European schools on the other hand have already developed courses that are vocationally oriented from day one of language learning. They have also created language schools for interpreters and translators, schools that are an integral part of public education.

Such courses may not be easily accepted into existing liberal arts programs at American universities. They seem, however, to offer an opportunity for the community or junior colleges to carve out a unique role in foreign language learning.

Public Relations There is a final concern which dwarfs all the rest. That is the continuing low priority which American culture places on foreign language learners. Because the problem is so formidable, we often tend to ignore it in favor of problems that seem more amenable to individual or group effort.

We foreign language teachers have a number of articles of faith that can be expressed in the form of a substitution drill.

1. If we have a dynamic teacher enrollments will increase.
2. individualize
3. improve teacher education
4. use audio-lingual methods
5. teach more small "c" culture

You can supply others I am sure. I might be interesting to see whether these statements are indeed true. Let us examine whether sizeable and lasting enrollment changes have truly accompanied such other changes in the past.

During World War I the teaching of German began a precipitous decline. I have never heard this credited to anything but the anti-German feeling which prevailed during the period.

After World War I, teaching of the Spanish language increased concurrently with the decline of German, Latin, and French. There is no evidence that Spanish teaching methods or materials were in any significant way different from those employed in teaching German or French. In fact, they probably resembled the teaching of Latin to a considerable degree. In any case, a colleague who lived through the period claims that many of the new Spanish teachers were actually former German teachers, who made the transition almost overnight. This suggests that the instruction in the new Spanish programs was actually worse than in the other languages but that Spanish enrollments grew in spite of this fact.

Nationally, enrollments reached their nadir about 1950. Between World War I and that point we had the grammar-translation method, the reading method, the direct method, and the army method. There is no evidence that I am aware of that any of these approaches demonstrated superiority in attracting young people to language learning over an extended period.

The rise of audio-lingualism in 1959, it is true, was accompanied by sizeable increases in school enrollments. The fact that enrollments reached a plateau or begin to decline in the late 1960's makes one suspect that the increases were caused by a number of influences, for example, the total of all NDEA components, including direct categorical aids to local school districts.

The downturn has brought about criticism of audio-lingual learning, language laboratories, and teacher education, the same factors which were praised as enrollments climbed. In retrospect, one can probably only claim that new methodology was only a temporary attraction. Now this is not to argue that good teaching and excellent materials do not result in superior learning. They probably even have some effect on enrollments.

However, Hoye, in the most recent Review of Foreign Language Education, demonstrates what promotion of language learning by a sympathetic administrator can do. He cites a number of cases in which junior high school foreign language enrollments doubled, and, though he does not so indicate, I can assure you there were no changes in foreign language staff, materials or methods.

The point of all this is that any real improvement of our basic problem of declining enrollments is unlikely to be brought about by the measures in which we commonly place our faith. Since America does not have the kind of national commitment to foreign language learning that one finds in most other countries of the world, we must try to create a sense of immediacy for foreign languages and cultures. Foreign language learning should not be all practice and no utilization. A friend of mine compares language learning with a football team practicing all week and never playing that Saturday game.

At the local level, teachers are going to have to promote their product. This may be repugnant to many of you but since students are not beating down the doors to get in our classes we are going to have to lure them in. We may have to go back to the pre-NDEA days and rediscover the ways teachers kept their programs alive fifteen to thirty years ago. The first shock is that in addition to teaching five hours a day, those teachers spent many hours on additional activities. They sponsored language clubs, took kids to foreign films, went to foreign restaurants, presented skits at PTA meetings, buttered up to counselors, visited lower schools and recruited, and sponsored language fairs or festivals. Now, many teachers are chaperoning students overseas or promoting language camps. The list might go on even longer, but I will stop there except to say that the teacher and his students must publicize these activities shamelessly. The public, students, fellow teachers, and administrators must be convinced that this foreign language department is a "do something" department. They are unlikely to be influenced by good teaching alone.

The National Scene Though all of us on the local level have this awesome responsibility to sell our own programs, we are likely to get some help.

In the early 1950's, in much darker times, the Modern Language Association of America under the leadership of William Riley Parker undertook what it called the Foreign Language Program, an activity that would profoundly affect foreign language learning in the United States in the late 1950's and the 1960's. The activities of the Foreign Language Program stimulated teaching foreign languages in the elementary schools, teacher education, use of educational technology in foreign language teaching, methodology, curriculum and not the least important foreign language enrollments. This kind of effort repeated is part of what the profession needs to get it moving again.

In May 1972, the MLA reactivated its Foreign Language Program under the guidance of William Schaefer, MLA Executive Secretary, and Kenneth Mildenberger, Deputy Executive Secretary. I have been attending steering committee meetings for this new Foreign Language Program and have high hopes that the Modern Language Association, The American Association on the Teaching of Foreign Languages working cooperatively with the various AAT's (French, German, Spanish, etc.) are going to have some good news in the near future regarding some new national programs.

We have an imposing task before us, but it is not hopeless. It requires, however, that we work hard and together in planning at the national level, the state level and the local level; then, that we carry out those acitivites that will make language learning the important part of education that it is in every other nation in the world. That is our challenge, and--need I mention--our bread and butter?

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